Internal Form for Oral History File

This file contains the oral history of: Willie Hebert

Recorded on: November 14, 2025

Recorded by: Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba

Recorded in (location): Oakland, California

For the Purpose of: To expand Oakland's 16th street station stories and record the stories of West Oakland residents, previous 16th street station employees and train riders, and family members of 16th street station train employees.

Oral History Description

Narrator's Age: 94

Narrator City/State: Oakland, California

Brief Summary: In this interview, Willie Hebert, a first generation Oakland resident, discusses his experience riding the Southern Pacific Line from Port Arthur, Texas to Oakland, California with his mother and sister in 1943; meeting his father after 6 months and why his father decided to move to Oakland for work; his first impressions of 16th street station including its activity and size of the station; explains Southern traditions of shoe box lunches; shares a story of a family's friend experience with race and racism; the importance of the station; his thoughts on why the station slowed down after the 1950's; what ways the station can support the West Oakland community; and Southern traditions his family brought to Oakland.

Subject:

Holding Institution:

Accession Number:

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File hebert_willie_01_11142025_ET_Trcl summary: In this interview, Willie Hebert, a first generation Oakland resident, discusses his experience riding the Southern Pacific Line from Port Arthur, Texas to Oakland, California with his mother and sister in 1943; meeting his father after 6 months and why his father decided to move to Oakland for work; his first impressions of 16th street station including its activity and size of the station; explains Southern traditions of shoe box lunches; shares a story of a family's friend experience with race and racism; the importance of the station; his thoughts on why the station slowed down after the 1950's; what ways the station can support the West Oakland community; and Southern traditions his family brought to Oakland.

Interview with: Willie Hebert
Interviewed by: Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba
Transcriber: Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba
[Interview #01: November 14, 2025]
[Begin Audio File: hebert_willie_01_11142025_ET_Trcl

[00:00:00] **Interviewer:** Okay, so we are now recording. This is Julissa Gomez Ruvalcaba, the 2025 to 2026 Oral History Fellow for the California State Road Museum. Today is November 14th, 2025. It is 2:48 PM. This oral history is being conducted in the home of Willie [People in the background are walking around the home and the floorboards squeak. A plane flies overhead] Before we begin this recording, Willie, do I have your permission to record this oral history and the permission of State Parks to publish this transcript in part or its entirety? And you can say yes or no.

[00:00:37] **Willie:** Yes.

[00:00:39] **Interviewer:** Okay. Awesome. Well thank you so much for meeting with me and also thank you for letting me into your home as well, so you have a beautiful home, like I said before. The first thing I'm going to ask are just some introductionary questions. So, can you state what is your name?

[00:00:55] **Willie:** My name is Willie Hebert Junior.

[00:01:01] **Interviewer:** Okay. And then can you tell me how old you are and where are you from?

[00:01:06] **Willie:** I am 94 years of age. And when—I guess I could probably say that I mean right here in Oakland, California.

[00:01:18] **Interviewer:** Are you originally from Oak, Oakland, or?

[00:01:21] **Willie:** No, I'm not.

[00:01:22] **Interviewer:** Where are you from originally?

[00:01:24] **Willie:** Well, it was. We'll start with birth which was Port Arthur Texas. Then, I migrated to Louisiana, Lake Charles and then to Oakland, California.

[00:01:41] **Interviewer:** Okay. And I think we can just go straight into that question because we're recording this oral history based on your connection to 16th Street Station.

[00:01:53] **Willie:** Okay.

[00:01:54] **Interviewer:** So can you explain what is your connection to the 16th Street station in West Oakland?

[00:02:01] **Willie:** Yes. As much as I can remember it was in World War II [a phone rings in the background] that my family moved from Louisiana to California. And that was in 1943, actually, and July the 18th which is my birthday. So I remember that real well.

[00:02:35] **Interviewer:** So on your birthday, your parents decided, or your whole family decided to move from Texas, correct?

[00:02:43] **Willie:** Yes.

[00:02:44] **Interviewer:** To Oakland?

[00:02:47] **Willie:** Yes.

[00:02:47] **Interviewer:** Through, so through the 16th Street station, can you explain, I guess the trip?

[00:02:52] **Willie:** Uh, somewhat. At that time, I was 11 years old and I remember my mother picked me up in Port Arthur, Texas because I was with my aunt at Lake Charles, Louisiana. So she picked me up and then my two sisters and my mother got on the, I think it was the Sunset Limited Southern Pacific railway in actually we boarded the train. We were—during this time, I did observe the fact that because I was 11. The separation—I hadn't had very much experience with the race thing. And that is when we boarded the train, the African Americans were placed in the front of the engine coach and what have you. And we were on that part of the train until we got to—I think it was El Paso. And after that we were free to room about within all the rest of the train. We arrived in Los Angeles, California.

[00:04:32] **Willie:** I forget the name of the station. It was very large station I remember. And because of the war effort that was going on at that time. We were—had to stay off. We were, you know, they had to—we—our connection actually wasn't complete. We had to let the military get on before we did. And it so happened that my mother had a friend that she called and we were able to stay overnight at her lodging. And then we took the train, I remember the name of the train. It was The Oowl, an older milk. They said it was a milk train or something. It must have been because [laughs] oh, woo. It was kind of a fun thing, you know, my sisters and myself, and it was a really new experience for us. And we came into Oakland, you know, and when we got to 16th Street Station and we got off and you know, this is all new to us, so we get off. My two sisters, my mother, myself, and mother didn't really know what to do. So she said, "*Well, look, I want you kids to stand here*." And this was on the platform of the station when we just got in. So she said, "*Just a minute*." She said, "*I'm gonna see about where do I go from here*?" And she said, "*You know that man over there looks something like your father?*" [Willie leans forward from recliner and points] Uh, I say, "*Yeah*." She said, "*Just a minute, wait a minute*." And she went over there to that man and they start to, to throwing their arms on each other and stuff. I say, "*Gee, I guess that's daddy*." [chuckles] And so, I, from that part on, he came and he got us [laughter in the background from family]. And you know, it was a really

happy occasion. And we proceeded to go into our lodging, which was not in Oakland per se. We went in through The Tuube and we got the project lodging there at Encinal Project at that time.

[00:07:33] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:35] **Willie:** And.

[00:07:38] **Interviewer:** And so did your dad first go to Oakland and then come, did he, did your father move from Texas to Oakland, situate himself and then call for your mom?

[00:07:50] **Amanda:** Yes.

[00:07:51] **Interviewer:** To bring.

[00:07:52] **Willie:** Yes. What happened is my father was—came before we did in order to get everything squared away and get a job and I think hired at Bethlehem Steel. They were building, ships at that time. And that's where we ended up—he had probably about six months between his arrival and then caught, getting his family back. It's about six months.

[00:08:33] **Interviewer:** Hmm. What was the reason that your father chose Oakland specifically? Do you know?

[00:08:43] **Willie:** Well, one of the main reasons was employment because, in the—well, actually [slight pause] when he knew about the war effort, World War II, he wanted to become a part of it, and opportunity was greater in California. And this is one of the reasons that he actually went on to California, I guess.

[00:09:26] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. And because I know some people went to Oakland, Los Angeles, some people went to Chicago and Detroit. But he spoke, he specifically chose California 'cause it had the most opportunity?

[00:09:43] **Willie:** Well actually we had some relatives [leans in his recliner] that had come to California earlier in the thirties. I had some cousins that were settled in Berkeley. So, they were—this was probably in 1936 or something like that because my, I remember my father's cousin was saying she graduated from Berkeley High in 1937. And so this was sort of one of the reasons that we felt like we had a base, you know, somewhere we could go with some people that we knew, you know, and this is one of the reasons that we got there.

[00:10:46] **Interviewer:** And the, the train ride from Texas to Oakland. Do you have any memory of it whatsoever?

[00:10:55] **Willie:** Not too much. Actually, I remember the trading of the—from the—when I— changed the African Americans up front and then we were able to go freely on the train. I remember that's part of it. I remember the military was very heavy. A lot of,

military people, soldiers, and, you know, some sailors, but mostly soldiers. And, I remember the station in Los Angeles, which was really something for me. Uh, being a young man coming in there for the first time it was really huge to me to get off the station in Los Angeles. And there were so many people because coming from a small town and to see so many people like in Los Angeles, oh, we were just, I didn't know which way to go. I turn around and around [laughs], but anyway. When we found out that we couldn't make our connection to Oakland, and Mother was able to contact a friend, we knew we had overnight lodging. So this happened, and, we caught, like I said, the, the milk train, which was I guess, a little slower. It wasn't. It wasn't not the Sunset Limited which was a big train during that time. And we as I stated, you know, we got on and saw my father and proceeded to get our transportation into Alameda.

[00:13:25] **Interviewer:** What was your impression of the 16th Street station when you arrived there?

[00:13:31] **Willie:** When I got to 16th Street station, my impression was first it seemed to be a little smaller than the Los Angeles station, but it was active. The people were coming in and taking the baggage and, you know, running the things. I guess the red caps do whatever. And we were trying to find some transportation. My dad did not have a car, so we had to get the, the bus, I guess, to the, to the house or something. And that was the, I think it was the key system was the name of the.

[00:14:22] **Interviewer:** Like a trolley?

[00:14:23] **Willie:** The transportation. Yeah.

[00:14:27] **Interviewer:** Okay. Um, I—what did I guess your family do after you arrived?

[00:14:37] **Willie:** After we arrived? Uh, immediately.

[00:14:40] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:14:40] **Willie:** Well, bu my father was trying to make a extra dollar or two, so he had rented our rooms to [slight laugh] some fellows that were working in the shipyard. So when we first got there, we didn't have lodging and we had something had to be done for these people to find them beds, you know, and stuff. So a little bit of confusion there at first for them to find another place to stay. And that was kind of my first coming into the house.

[00:15:31] **Interviewer:** And was the house near the station or was it a bit far away?

[00:15:36] **Willie:** The house was—we'll say from 16th Street Station to Webster Street—if you're familiar with Oakland. And, we, the transportation, we had to catch the bus. We caught the bus and it went through the Webster Street, which is The Tube they called it. That was my first experience with that too. And the Posey Tube was there and we came to The Tube and to me it was a, a tunnel tunnel. It was dark, you know, and we went, because we hadn't had that experience before. And we came out into Alameda and it was pretty close. Oh, The Tube was probably about a long, about a mile long. And then

from that point to where we stayed was actually about a mile and a half. And we were that close to the shipyard because I could look out the window and see the fellas working at the shipyard and see the flares or the torches as they were welding and what have you. There was a lot of activity. A lot of people.

[00:17:12] **Interviewer:** I want to go into that a little bit. You said that 16th Street Station, even though it was smaller in comparison to Los Angeles Union Station [phone rings in the background] that it was very active.

[00:17:24] **Willie:** Yes.

[00:17:24] **Interviewer:** Can you go more into what you saw in terms of activity?

[00:17:31] **Willie:** Well, basic, basically when watching my parents seeing each other, and I—there were lines. I guess people were getting tickets on fine and where they would be going. But there— but I think probably maybe on the left side from the tracks, there was a baggage area and the people that was the luggage carriers and thing, they were busy loading and unloading the, you know, the platform there. And we— it took us, I don't know about how long to get transportation. Maybe an hour, maybe, maybe less.

[00:18:32] **Interviewer:** That's a long time.

[00:18:33] **Willie:** Mm-hmm.

[00:18:34] **Interviewer:** Just to wait. I, one of, one of my questions I guess related to that was when you were taking the train, did you see any women who are working like as well, like call car porters at all?

[00:18:54] **Willie:** What do you mean? The people working actually in the station?

[00:19:00] **Interviewer:** Um. In the train. So there, um, there's, um—

[00:19:06] **Willie:** —While on —

[00:19:07] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:19:09] **Willie:** Yeah, I saw some of the conductions that were in the train and they were directing us as to which way to go. And the fact that, you know, when we made the big change in El Paso, that was, you know, it was kind of ruffle, buffle, shuffling people to see desired areas that they wanted to change. Yeah, I remember. I remember that. And most it seemed like it was the time was spent maybe sleeping a lot because we were, you know, young people with kids. So we didn't do a lot.

[00:20:01] **Interviewer:** How long was the train ride? From.

[00:20:04] **Willie:** From where?

[00:20:05] **Interviewer:** From Texas. The whole, the whole train ride. How, how many days did it take?

[00:20:09] **Willie:** Mmmmmh. [leans into recliner and phone goes off in background]

[00:20:17] **Willie:** I couldn't actually say, but I would say approximately three days or maybe two, two days, two plus days from Lake Charles to, to, the sunset. Where was it? In LA? Mm-hmm. It was over a day anyway.

[00:20:47] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. And did your mother like pack anything, like any of food?

[00:20:52] **Willie:** Oh, yeah. You know, we had to eat. We didn't have any dining cars or anything of that sort. So she had us a lunch, a nice bread, some fried chicken, and I think we had some sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes and some, some, some, some candy. I think it was some type of candy. And I think we had something like that sandwiches more or less.

[00:21:31] **Interviewer:** Was it more so that your mom this packed food for the road because she didn't want to spend any extra money? 'Cause you said that there was no dining cars?

[00:21:40] **Willie:** Oh, no, no, no. [laughs as he speaks] I didn't know that was such a thing as a dining room. [laughs] Uh, but no, we had bags, we had these brown bags and we had fried chicken. And, you know, that we had, that they had already cooked. And mmmh, more or less like I said, [phone goes off in background] I, I don't think I remember some sweet potatoes and, and that we had. And there may be some type of drink. I don't remember any, like lemonade or anything of that sort. I couldn't really remember.

[00:22:27] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. [family member gets up and walks toward back of home. Floor boards squeak underneath]

[00:22:28] **Interviewer:** I guess what were some of the items that your mother brought or you and your family brought with you from Texas to Oakland?

[00:22:38] Willie: Actually, just about the items that we brought were our basic clothing. You know, that we purchased and we didn't have too much in the way of luggage, you know, but we did have some of it, but, you know, clothes though to, to, to go. And it, it was sought.

[00:23:17] **Willie:** We stayed at—in LA at this, my mother's friend's house and he worked for the hotel. I think he was a porter in the hotel. And he did some things, you know, little extra things for us. The drinks, for instance, we had there and. Got us to the train and. Oh, I don't know, was the excitement, I guess, is the travel that I can remember.

[00:24:05] **Interviewer:** Can we go into that? How we, how did you feel throughout the whole train ride? You can speak about that little bit.

[00:24:11] **Willie:** Well, actually about the train ride. The train ride was—the whole thing from say, Louisiana to California was kind of a, a hustle bustle type thing. It was like, you know, because, the military presence was, you could see the right there—very prominent. And when we got to the Los Angeles and got to Oakland. It seemed to be slowing down a little bit, but the presence of the— I think it was more marine and sailor presence than there were army during this time. And I guess they were— the kids were there and they were nice. They gave us little things, little, you know, little candy and stuff that, you know, as we rode. Yeah.

[00:25:31] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. What did you believe is one of the reasons that your family, aside from let's say, opportunity, wanted to move from Texas to, well, not aside from opportunity, but what do you think was some of the reasons that your family wanted to move from Texas to California?

[00:25:53] **Willie:** Actually, my father wanted to go to not specifically Oakland, but he wanted to come to California because he had a, a sort of a different type of job. My father came from Crowley, Louisiana, where it's. Crowley is Rice capital, they say in Louisiana, of course. And so he came from that area and he got a job in Texas in Port Arthur Texas with Gulf Oil Corporation. And he was fortunate enough to meet my mother whose brother worked in the main office. He was like one of the gopher guys, I'll give him that name. He was an African American that was quite prominent in Gulf Oil Cooperation as one of the janitors or what have you. And, and occasion he had sometimes where he babysitted the President's kids, you know, so he was very on the inside. With this kind of connection my dad was able to get a job as elevator boy, I guess they call him. And also, he worked in the cafeteria. He had a, you know, a uniform. He was, because my father always did dress. He— this is how he lived, you know, so, I mean, this is all he knew. [in the background a family walks around the home and the floorboards squeak] But anyway, where this type of background and coming into Oakland was a different type of a life for him, you know 'cause he had all this mechanical stuff and he wasn't really up to date on that. So he ended up working at the officer's club at the Navy base, so he worked there.

[00:28:41] **Interviewer:** Okay. And what did your mother do?

[00:28:44] **Willie:** Well, my mother was a housewife part of the time, but then again, she got a job at Swing Shift working with the army in the Alameda that they had a— some type, I guess it was supply type thing that she worked with [a phone rings in the background saying “Unknown Caller”].

[00:29:09] **Interviewer:** The WPA? Maybe?

[00:29:15] **Willie:** I don't know what, what's—

[00:29:17] **Interviewer:** —WPA. Oh, goodness. Basically like an organization that's like, during World War II, people would be employed by them and some women would work through that. So maybe.

[00:29:28] **Willie:** Well actually see it was, it was a military type thing. And they were packaging stuff to put on the ship, you know, for, for them to type in. She and some other ladies were doing. My mother that is—her job. This is what she was doing. Some of the other ladies were ribboning and working in the shipyard. [laughs] No, my mother didn't work in the shipyard. She worked in the sort like pack packaging or something like that.

[00:29:59] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. Aside from traveling, I guess from Texas all the way to Oakland, did you ever take the 16th street station train to other parts?

[00:30:16] **Willie:** Let me seee. The only thing, I think we had a couple of trips back to Los Angeles, you know, but we didn't go any, any, any further than, you know, because this is where some of her relatives and friends were in LA, so we went a couple of times there.

[00:30:53] **Interviewer:** Can you explain the experience of this traveling, traveling from Oakland to Los Angeles?

[00:31:01] **Willie:** That would be a little hard, but let me see.

[00:31:08] **Willie:** Mmmh, she only had one friend, Maizie, who [moves in recliner] she and my sisters. This was our only like— type vacation going to LA and I can remember the train what was the main place in LA? The train statute, station? Union. You said Union station.

[00:31:54] **Interviewer:** The union, yeah. The union station.

[00:31:55] **Willie:** Yeah. Yeah, I can remember Union, a union station there. And getting there and getting the fact that there was activity with, I think it was street cars or doing their thing. We went to this place that was called—it was probably a lot of African Americans would be in this area, Central Avenue where the entertainers, the African entertainers would be. And it so happened that, the—my mother's husband, no, my mother's friend's husband [slight laugh] had a job at one time at the capital of Washington DC and he was one of the head waiters or something that they had in there. So she had some objects there that were really very good, that you know, keepsakes and what have you. I remember those things.

[00:33:16] **Willie:** And her friend's mother came from Louisiana. And she was an old Creole lady and it was just a joy to spend time with her because of her experience. And she was very up to date on current events and stuff like that. She was a smart old lady and she would tell us some of the things and like about that that would happening in, in Washington and with this husband of a daughter. Yeah, it is like a good story [laughs] to be told.

[00:34:23] **Interviewer:** Did you and your mother or your family pick her up at the station?

[00:34:28] **Willie:** Mmmm?

[00:34:29] **Interviewer:** Did you and your family pick up the relative who came to Louisiana at the station?

[00:34:36] **Willie:** Did we pick up some?

[00:34:38] **Interviewer:** Did you, did you pick her up from the station? Did you meet her at the station? To—

[00:34:42] **Willie:** —What the, this lady?

[00:34:44] **Interviewer:** Yes.

[00:34:45] **Willie:** Well, I'll tell you what happened. Yeah, we did. We picked her up from Union Station to 16th Street Station and we walked, we came out and we picked her up. We know actually in a lot of African Americans that you might find are very, what the, the, the, the, the pigmentation in the skin is, they were somewhat easily mistaken for European or white. And this is what this lady, that's was kind of lady that she was, she was in appearance she was a white lady, and she was telling us, getting off the station because she got off the station with a white couple and they were together and they, they were inviting her to dinner, you know, and because they had just made the trip together. And she, and they told her, "*We want you to come*," but she, they didn't see us. [starts to laugh] And when she left and, and came to us and they looked and they saw that we were Black and Jesus, oh, they turned their head and they, they cut out from that lady. And, Mrs. this, the lady was named, my mother's friend's mother was named Zelamae and Ms. Zelamae said, and then she spoke broken English so she said, "*Just look at them thing*." This is what she says, "*Just, just look at these things*" because they turned from her so rapidly from being a wholehearted, you know, person and what have you into a coldblooded, you know, type thing. Simply because of the pigmentation of the skin. 16th Street Station.

[00:37:19] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:37:23] **Interviewer:** Do, I don't know, do you wanna go more—

[00:37:25] **Willie:** Hmm.

[00:37:25] **Interviewer:** Into, I know, do you wanna go more into that topic or more into how to dive? [Interviewer laughs then Willie laughs]

[00:37:35] **Amanda:** It's an interesting topic for sure.

[00:37:37] **Interviewer:** Yeah, because I'm just thinking of what you were saying about how it was the, the quickness and the turn. What, I guess what other type of stories do you have related to, the station or maybe even growing up in Oakland or anything of that sort?

[00:37:52] **Willie:** What, no repeat that, repeat that please.

[00:37:57] **Interviewer:** What other memories do you have related to 16th street station or your time growing up in Oakland? From someone who is a migrant from the South. [plane flies overhead]

[00:38:12] **Willie:** Mmmh. Well, when all of my people came from the South, I had cousins that came. It is on my side of the family most of the people were from Louisiana for some reason or another. I guess they migrated, you know here maybe because they had relatives or something [leans into recliner]. But, they ended up working in the waterfronts, the Long Showman, my cousin Johnny, and all his brothers and two of my cousins, you know. Now this is just in the forties now. These are the–when the change was coming. We, I'm talking about 43' when I got there. And from that point 45', 46, as the change was taking place when trains were really the main way of moving about, yeah. And so they came, I had some friends.

[00:39:37] **Willie:** I ended up, me and a friend, I made some, oh, I don't like, I, I, I had a friend of mine, a Hispanic guy from Alameda. I met in the projects and we probably were in the sixth grade together. Sixth grade together? Maybe yeah. And we just struck up to be buddies all this time, and I'm talking about around around 40', around 45' [stretches the word 45'], around 1945. And guys turned out to be as matter of fact, I'm just trying to lead up to this. That's his picture right up there. Hispanic guy. My buddy. Very close [points toward a photo frame behind the interviewer. The photo frame has a photo of Willie and his friend when they are older].

[00:40:44] **Interviewer:** To this day?

[00:40:45] **Willie:** Hmm?

[00:40:46] **Interviewer:** To this day, you're still close?

[00:40:48] **Willie:** Still to this day. Yeah. Mm-hmm. So, you know, I mean—hey—we—it is just. This is what Oakland has done for me. I mean, I heard you speaking a minute ago about something about the African American museum, and as you spoke about African American Museum, we had a small at Jack London Square, we had a little shop, and in that area was the African American Museum, and my wife became one. She—this was her business, [laughs] but she was the one that worked real closely with the lady that had the African American Museum when it started out so she could probably tell you. Quite a bit about it. Maybe something, anyway.

[00:42:01] **Interviewer:** I think so. Mm-hmm. I actually don't know how old the museum is.

[00:42:05] **Willie:** Mmmm?

[00:42:05] **Interviewer:** I said, I actually don't know how old the museum is. So, it would be interesting to speak about the one, it would be interesting to speak about the growth of the museum—

[00:42:17] **Willie:** —Uhhuh

[00:42:17] **Interviewer:** —and the, the history and everything like that. I, I wanted to ask a little bit about the question which I love. Why, what, what do you think is the significance of the 16th Street?

[00:42:42] **Willie:** Would you repeat that please? [pauses before speaking]

[00:42:44] **Interviewer:** What do you think is the significance, or why do you think the station is so important?

[00:42:50] **Willie:** Well, mmh, one of the reasons I think that that station is so important is because the history of the change in Oakland because for me, this was a new part of my adult life, you know, as I came up from a 12-year-old and the first place I went was—to 16th Street Station where I saw all of the people and began to see, you know, a different type of life. You know, the young kids growing up and what have you, and. I saw, actually, I observed the fact that there were quite a few African Americans employed in different areas in the station, mainly baggage handlers, you know, and cab, bu, guys and what have you. But it was, uh, a part of Oakland that was busy. There were things happening, you know, and I observed that.

[00:44:32] **Interviewer:** You, you stated that the station added to the change that was happening in Oakland. Can you expand on what this change is about that you are talking about or that you are talking about?

[00:44:43] **Willie:** Well, the change that I'm talking about is the inception of the airplane, the, the chance from the people that were taking in droves on the train and it's evolved. It changed to the people now flying and in planes which I don't know, like maybe the younger people, they don't even know about 16th street station [laughs as he talks]. But, but to me as a younger person, this was a way of life. You know, I mean, when you think of the transportation era. Right around the Bay Area, we have the, the train movement, Southern Pacific and, and being based. Actually, another thing is the 16th street station we knew about that on, I think it was on 5th Street in Oakland, that the trains would stop and lay, have layovers, and the Pullman porters would be here to see. The economy was kind of blooming doing this. We had the, oh, activity. I remember they, I guess something, somebody said something about Dellums and, and, and all this type stuff. In the area. They had a union with the Pullman porters that were stationed there at 16th street station. So this is part of the real activity, and we began to build an area, especially in West Oakland a community of people that has some type of upgraded society. This is just about, that's, that World War II, to maybe the end of the fifties because things changed and I don't know whether it was because of the aircraft, you know, and, and the flying or what have you. But, uh, things did change.

[00:47:52] **Interviewer:** In what ways, was it, was it like the community was changing or was it more so the use of the station was changing?

[00:48:00] **Willie:** I think it was, um. [elongated pause before speaking next] Actually the fact that the railroad became more of--from a transportation type to a freight type area

and so we lost the excitement of the, of the stations, for instance, and the things that happened during the stations because, you know, there were, I guess they were little, all kind of stands and what have you within the station and people doing things of that sort, kind of fun type things, meeting each other and what have you. So, that was there, but we kind of lost that because that moved from there and it became to some guy and with a break and the engines [laughs] and what have you, some oils, what ha, and they, and money.

[00:49:28] **Interviewer:** Do you know what time that change happened? [family member coughs in background]

[00:49:34] **Willie:** Mmmh [coughs].

[00:49:44] **Willie:** I would think about around 58'.

[00:49:50] **Interviewer:** Oh, 58' when it kind of went the station kind of went a little bit down in terms of activity?

[00:49:55] **Willie:** Yeah. Down around 58'. I would think that, this, the changes begin to, you couldn't notice what, you know, that, we were there. The prestige of the, you know, the Pullman Porters, like we used to have African American Pullman Porters. They was something to see in their outfits that, that dressed and what have you. And, but that sort of went away. Then there went, it was a [laughs] flight stewardess and things. This was a different type thing.

[00:50:37] **Interviewer:** That's so interesting because the station didn't officially close down. I might be missaying it, but like in the 1990s.

[00:50:45] **Willie:** Oh yeah.

[00:50:45] **Willie:** Oh, oh yeah. Yeah—

[00:50:46] **Interviewer:** —This, when it officially closed.

[00:50:49] **Willie:** Mm-hmm.

[00:50:49] **Interviewer:** But you're saying like in the 1950s?—

[00:50:52] **Willie:** —Yeah—

[00:50:52] **Interviewer:** —1958 is when it got down.

[00:50:54] **Willie:** You could see it decline into the you know, what they are possibly today. But there again if we sit and wait and we look, we are seeing an inception of a new type of rail travel. We're getting this the rail up to speed now with the speed trains that are gonna— going. I guess some of them's on the map right now. I mean, in United

States, other countries already have them, but, we are beginning to get some things going on right now.

[00:51:39] **Interviewer:** Right. The high speed. I think in Cali, in California, they have the plan.

[00:51:43] **Willie:** Yes, I was—

[00:51:43] **Interviewer:** —You've been working on it for a while—

[00:51:44] **Willie:** —I was in Fresno, but there's quite a bit of activity in that area.

[00:51:51] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:51:51] **Willie:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.

[00:51:54] **Interviewer:** What do you think gives us is, why do you think 16th Street Station is so important to the West Oakland community?

[00:52:09] **Willie:** [pause before speaking] I would think that 16th Street Station is more or less a symbol of status of a sort of something like Disneyland or something like that. It's, it's. It's like a. I don't know what, how to describe it I would think that it would, it would be something that I figure that we should know about that is to see the change that has occurred and how it came about.

[00:53:02] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. And so with that being said, what do you envision the 16th Street Station in the future?

[00:53:18] **Willie:** I would think that 16th Street Station would be population increased in the Bay Area for one. Their building and people are coming to and for and what used to be across the river is now across the ocean. So people are moving about and they need transportation. And people don't necessarily, all of them want to fly, but it's wonderful to be able to take a train like at 16th Street Station and get a compartment and you know that you're going, oh, maybe to San Diego for a comfortable short [slight laugh] ride and this type thing that I'm thinking for 16th Street—it's a connection to different parts north, south, east.

[00:54:54] **Interviewer:** Do you think it would be possible, given, I don't know if you've seen the station in its current state or also they've removed tracks and everything. Do you think it would be possible to reopen the station or is that just maybe like a hope of some sort to maybe repurpose it, reuse it?

[00:55:13] **Willie:** Well, you know, I have a cousin [family member walks around the home, the floorboards squeak] that just went to New York, I think it was— they just took a trip to New York. And on the compartment. And, they happened to take the train at what is that?

[00:55:47] **Amanda:** Emeryville.

[00:55:47] **Willie:** Emeryville and but somehow, but, but see, I'm older and I've seen things. I know about 16th Street Station. I don't really know that much about Emeryville.

[00:56:03] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:56:05] **Willie:** But I do know that the 16th Street station has already things in place that could very easily connect, to the 16th Street station. And like I say, there is gonna be a population explosion where we gonna have to have the people, to utilize this.

[00:56:39] **Interviewer:** The space and everything.

[00:56:40] **Willie:** Yeah.

[00:56:41] **Interviewer:** What, in what ways can 16th Street Station, aside from let's say, reopening and and being a station once again, what, what could this station, how can I say this? In what ways could this space support the local community, aside from it being just a station that you take to San Diego?

[00:57:06] **Willie:** Well, you've got 16th Street Station, I was hearing something a minute, a minute ago, and there's been a whooole big controversy about the A's baseball game and all that type of stuff. I mentioned to you about a Disneyland. My thought would be to have something similar around that whole area [moves his recliner up] to be what do you call it for the kids—

[00:57:51] **Amanda:** Amtrak.

[00:57:52] **Willie:** —and all that kind of stuff for that. And the 16th Street station could play a very large part of something of that sort.

[00:58:05] **Interviewer:** So do you believe it's important for the station to be accessible to the public then?

[00:58:09] **Willie:** Oh, yes.

[00:58:12] **Interviewer:** Ok. Because currently it's not. It's, so what is your opinion that is currently not accessible to the public?

[00:58:19] **Willie:** No, no. Say it again.

[00:58:20] **Interviewer:** What's your opinion about it not being accessible to the public? Currently it's closed off to the public.

[00:58:27] **Willie:** I think it would be a loss because it's right there at the hub of transportation. We hit San Francisco with the Bay Bridge and all of the other areas that it

could be a jump off a spot plus if there was some activities going on, it could be really, a real important part of the puzzle.

[00:59:14] **Interviewer:** Mmhmm. You mentioned Em, Emeryville, the em, you mentioned the Emeryville Station, and also Jack London Station as well. So those are, those are actually relatively new stations. So Jack, London and Emeryville are new stations in comparison to 16th Street. So do you believe that, so they were made post, the earthquake, so the Loma Prieta earthquake, do you think that the station would've stayed open? Would you think, do you think that 16th Street Station would've remained open despite these new stations opening? Is my question that I'm trying to get to.

[00:59:48] **Willie:** Mm-hmm.

[00:59:56] **Willie:** Well.

[01:00:03] **Willie:** One of the things that I would say it should because of the building up of Oakland-- around the different stations. See, you know, we kind of like a spider web. We have so many freeways going here and there and there [slight laugh]. So, you know, 6th, 16th Street Station is a very close shot from here to San Francisco. See. And a part north, you know, to, to hook up to whatever I say, I think it would be a be a good idea [family member walking around the home, the floorboards squeak as Willie speaks].

[01:00:54] **Interviewer:** To have had it maybe remain open. Did you, so you spoke about Union Station over in Los Angeles, you spoke about 16th Street Station. Did you take any other trains around Oakland whatsoever, or did you maybe use 16th Street Station when you would travel?

[01:01:22] **Willie:** Mmmmmmh, not really. I don't think, or I don't understand what you're saying.

[01:01:30] **Interviewer:** Oh, it's, I can rephrase it.

[01:01:31] **Willie:** Mm-hmm.

[01:01:31] **Interviewer:** So you spoke about how you took 16th Street Station for traveling. Did you take any other train stations around, around Oakland or that the main train station that you would take?

[01:01:51] **Willie:** If it was available, I think I would take 16th Street station. But there again, it would depend on what's happening in the rest of the, around Oakland proper, you know. What's building the building up around it.

[01:02:11] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[01:02:13] **Willie:** Because it may be sensible to go out on it and take that 'cause everything's already set in place.

[01:02:21] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. Do you have a theory of maybe why the 16th Street station was specifically placed in Oakland and in also like in West Oakland as well as someone who migrated from Texas here? Why do you think the station was placed in this specific location?

[01:02:38] **Willie:** Once again, I would say it's a center of transportation. You could get your ferries— you get your-- you can unload your stuff, you know, from the ships and, and what have you. And, going all the different places. And, oh, you know, we got the airports naturally, but they don't carry the load. That, and you don't have, the congestion of your trucks getting to the freeways in certain areas that, you got to when you get right down at the port and hook up and go ahead and, or down in Mexico, actually all down to San Diego.

[01:03:32] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. One thing I want to ask, which is going a little bit off, off topic in a way, but not really. I asked you earlier about when you were traveling as a child from Texas to, to Oakland, or even when you were took the train, train in general, you stated that you saw Pullman Porters because you were going around. Did you ever see any female Pullman portal, Pullman Porters?

[01:03:59] **Willie:** No.

[01:04:00] **Interviewer:** Never?

[01:04:01] **Willie:** No. U-uh.

[01:04:04] **Interviewer:** You only saw a male?

[01:04:06] **Willie:** I only saw men.

[01:04:08] **Amanda:** Hmm.

[01:04:08] **Interviewer:** It's because in 1943, they actually did like an experiment and they had, five women hired as Pullman Porters. So, uh, we're trying to see if anyone has seen, has seen them, or—

[01:04:24] **Willie:** —Mmmh—

[01:04:25] **Interviewer:** —witnessed 'em, because there was no record of 'em really.

[01:04:28] **Willie:** No. I'm— I didn't see any [moves in his recliner].

[01:04:32] **Interviewer:** And that's okay. Yeah. We're trying to figure that out.

[01:04:34] **Willie:** Yeah.

[01:04:34] **Interviewer:** Where did they go?

[01:04:35] **Willie:** You know.

[01:04:37] **Interviewer:** I wanna ask if there's anything that I missed as you were speaking about your experience migrating from Texas to Oakland, and also just your experience. I would say like maybe just with 16th Street Station or anything else that I may have missed that you want to add.

[01:05:16] **Willie:** That's kind of tough deal because I have to do a lot of research into basic transportation. No—not at this time, no.

[01:05:35] **Interviewer:** No.

[01:05:36] **Willie:** Hmm.

[01:05:36] **Interviewer:** As I ask you that question, I wanted to ask one more question.

[01:05:40] **Willie:** Go ahead.

[01:05:40] **Interviewer:** Which was did your family bring any, like, traditions and customs with them to the, not to the U.S. My bad, to California?

[01:05:48] **Willie:** Did we do what now?

[01:05:50] **Interviewer:** Bring any, like, traditions from the South or any customs? Did you bring any of that to California?

[01:05:56] **Willie:** Yeees. Um, actually from the South to California, right?

[01:06:06] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[01:06:08] **Willie:** And, I don't know. I think actually, but it was in a small portion, but I would think about food preparation. You know such as different restaurants, different types of, of food. They would bring. Now we know that California produces all of the vegetables, whatever type things, but we—I don't know. I don't think there's a large assortment of.

[01:06:58] **Amanda:** What about the food, Daddy? What about—

[01:07:01] **Willie:** —Mmmh— [turns toward Amanda when she speaks]

[01:07:01] **Amanda:** —Gumbo, gumbo, is that something?

[01:07:05] **Willie:** Oh. But yeeaah, but I don't know that, but that is a very strong point. Yeah. We, of course that's, you know, but well, yeah, because of New Orleans, I'm sure we are thinking of New Orleans. Like, three, three weeks ago I had gumbo and you know, you know about gumbo?

[01:07:35] **Interviewer:** I know. It's like a stew and it takes a really long time to make [slight laughter in the background].

[01:07:39] **Willie:** Well not necessarily you just gotta know what you're doing.

[01:07:42] **Interviewer:** Okay [Willie laughs].

[01:07:42] **Willie:** But, but, one of the things. Yeah. Because yeah, that's been a, a tradition— food, I would say. And she mentioned gumbo because yeah. That is a really ...thing [1]that we do often. It's a break. And it's a chance to use some things that we may have not used or thrown away, you know, you know, and pretty good deal.

[01:08:19] **Interviewer:** It's—I like—it's like repurposing the food that you would've otherwise thrown away, like you said. To combat food waste.

[01:08:27] **Willie:** Hmm. Say it again [leans toward Interviewer].

[01:08:30] **Interviewer:** As you're speaking about gumbo, I've seen it as a way to repurpose the food you might have thrown away otherwise. So it's a way to combat food waste.

[01:08:40] **Willie:** Yeah. Possibly. Yes. Very good. Because, you know, yeah, it has so much in it.

[01:08:46] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[01:08:47] **Willie:** And, and there's so many variations that can be used. Some guy said, "*I don't eat crab, I don't eat shrimp, I don't eat.*" You know, these are some of the main ingredients. But, the one I had the other day, chicken, chicken gumbo, I said, "*I don't want any crab*." I told them, and it was delicious. You should have been there [Willie and his family members laugh].

[01:09:16] **Interviewer:** Did someone make it or did you purchase it somewhere?

[01:09:18] **Willie:** Oh, no, made.

[01:09:20] **Interviewer:** Oh, you made it?

[01:09:21] **Willie:** Yeah.

[01:09:21] **Interviewer:** I don't know.

[01:09:22] **Willie:** We got it together.

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[1] Removed word for clarification based on Narrator's notes.

[01:09:23] **Interviewer:** I think that makes sense because like it's similar, like I don't really go out to eat Mexican food. I can just go to my house. Like same, same situation.

[01:09:30] **Amanda:** Yeah.

[01:09:31] **Interviewer:** I should have been here, have been a different day [family members laugh in the background]. I'm trying to think if I, I'll ask the question once more just in case is there anything else that you want to add about 16th Street Station or does anything you want to share prior to ending the recording?

[01:09:51] **Willie:** Well, actually my wife, myself, and I guess it was my daughter about eight months ago, I guess we parked at 16th Street Station and we looked to see what had become a 16th street station.

[01:10:14] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[01:10:15] **Willie:** What, what such a vibrant thing and look at what has become today. Our—I don't know. I—our younger people. It's so busy. I guess maybe, but. I think that 16th Street Station could be upgraded. [pause before he speaks] When I say that upgraded, I mean today upgraded. In other words, computerized. I think there's so many different ways that it can be utilized. 16th Street Station and it could be the center of some type of transportation, whether it is just electronic or whatever. [lifts hand and hits it on the recliner] That's about all I got.

[01:11:36] **Interviewer:** Cool. Well, thank you so much for for sharing your story with me.

[01:11:39] **Willie:** Mm-hmm.

[01:11:40] **Interviewer:** I appreciate it. I'm gonna end the recording.